PREVENTING MOTOR VEHICLE INJURIES

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- Motor vehicle crashes remain the leading cause of death for people 1 to 34 years of age in the United States and the leading cause of injury death for all ages, accounting for nearly 44,000 deaths in 2001.
- Impaired driving will affect one in three Americans during their lifetime. In 2002, alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes accounted for 41% of all traffic-related deaths.
- Two out of five deaths among U.S. teens are the result of motor vehicle crashes. Per mile driven, teen drivers 16 to 19 years of age are four times more likely than older drivers to crash.
- Children 4 years and younger are particularly vulnerable. Of the 459 children ages 4 years and younger who were fatally injured in 2002, 40% were completely unrestrained.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC and the Task Force on Community Preventive Services have systematically reviewed the literature on community-based interventions to reduce alcohol-impaired driving. A recent review revealed that, under certain conditions, mass media campaigns effectively prevent alcohol-impaired driving. Another review found evidence that school-based educational programs decrease riding with alcohol-impaired drivers. However, there was insufficient evidence on whether the programs effectively decreased alcohol-impaired driving (see www.thecommunityguide.org). CDC researchers found that between 1982 and 2001, the number of fatal alcohol-related crashes among drivers 16 to 20 years of age decreased almost 60%, suggesting that prevention measures targeting this age group have been effective. Analyses published in a CDC *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* study showed that American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to suffer motor vehicle death rates nearly twice those of other Americans.

Learning to drive safely takes time and practical experience. Graduated drivers licensing (GDL) is one strategy that encourages skills development. This system limits young drivers by setting restrictions that are systematically lifted as driving experience and competence is gained. GDL studies worldwide have found 5% to 16% reductions in crashes among teenage drivers. CDC supported and contributed to both a special edition of the *Journal of Safety Research* documenting GDL research evidence and a special supplement of *Injury Prevention* focusing on young drivers.

Example of Program in Action

CDC funds and assists health department programs in Colorado and Michigan to implement and evaluate community-based interventions to reduce motor vehicle-related injuries. The planned interventions were selected from *The Community Guide to Preventive Services*, a systematic review of community-based interventions lead by CDC scientists. In 2004, CDC will fund two Native American tribes to implement and evaluate interventions selected from *The Guide*.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC will conduct research to determine differences in motor vehicle-related injury rates by race in order to identify health disparities and inform effective interventions. To address the growing concern of older drivers, researchers need to better understand the transportation and safety behaviors of older adults and the consequences of driving as well as driving cessation.

For additional information on this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/program *January 2004*